

Concepts in Leadership

CMSgt David J. Campanale

Having served in the Air Force for almost 25 years, I've been afforded the opportunity to study, practice, and experience many ideas—concepts if you will—relative to leadership. By no means do I consider myself an expert on the subject, nor do I consider myself to be a great leader. However, I do believe I know enough about the subject to offer some advice and ideas about what makes a leader. You've probably heard or read about these thoughts before, so please forgive me for being a bit repetitive. The truth be known, the concepts I'm about to discuss are not the ones the Air Force *taught*. (It only received and defined them.) Instead, these are concepts taught and shown to me by one of the two heroes (heroines) in my life—my mother.

I should begin by describing my mom because it's important to know a little about her. She was a first-generation daughter of an Italian immigrant, never graduated from high school, and was never afforded much of a chance for any formal education either. She married, had three children, and learned all she needed from the *Bible* and any book she could pick up. She also became a single parent long before the phrase was coined—working low-income jobs (sometimes two) and very long hours, trying to make ends meet. She did all she could to provide for her family so they could have more. She was a hard worker, dedicated to only one principle—being a good person. That's not much of a résumé for a great leader, but she taught me much about leadership through word and deed, and I'd like to share those with you. There are seven principles that I call my Seven Sacraments of Leadership.

First, there's *discipline*, a harsh word to many but in fact a very important ingredient in the leadership recipe. Disciplined leaders do basic things extremely well—like saying “please” and “thank you,” “yes, ma'am,” or “no, sir.” They wake up on time, are punctual, and usually are the first ones to arrive and the last to leave. They ask for help when they need it, return the favor tenfold, and offer assistance as a matter of practice. They stand when someone enters the room and offer their hand in friendship to all. They respect all people regardless of who they are, where they come from, and what they look like, and they realize that when someone they lead fails, they too have failed.

CMSgt David J. Campanale is chief master sergeant of the Air Force.

Second is *compassion*, which is a necessary counterweight to offset the discipline that leaders must have. There is no outline on how to be compassionate. It's simply the art of knowing when and having the gift of knowing why. The disciplinarian in a leader will accept no wrong, even if it means standing up and being the person who causes someone to have to leave the Air Force. The compassionate balance means that after a leader has done that, he or she will still try to help, and will wish that person well because he or she also has self-esteem, value, and worth.

Third, and often misunderstood, is *courage*. The courage I speak of is not the kind that causes one to dive in front of bullets or run into burning buildings to save someone's life. That is bravery. The courage I speak of is the courage to do what's right, the courage to accept the responsibility of caring for others, the courage to even want to be a leader. If you want to be a leader, go for it, but you'll need to have courage because leaders become targets, especially when things don't go so well. Leaders don't have to be perfect; they just have to be able to assume the risks of leadership and accept the circumstances associated with that role.

Fourth, and purposely in the middle, is *perspective*. It's always remembering that nothing is ever as good as it seems and, more important, nothing is ever as bad as it seems. It's looking back at what was and looking ahead to what could be. I could tell you a long story to describe perspective from a personal point of view but an easier, shorter example from a professional standpoint is more appropriate. A close friend of mine had an alcohol problem that was destroying his life and career. After repeated attempts on my part to persuade him to stop, I turned him in. “I ratted out my friend” and felt terrible doing it. I knew it could hurt his promotion chances and I'm sure it did, but I knew the alternatives of not doing so were even worse. I weighed the facts and made the best decision by keeping the balance—having perspective. Thankfully, so did he. He's doing great as a senior noncommissioned officer and even better as a husband and father.

Fifth is the *desire to volunteer*. We've probably all been taught in our military career never to volunteer. What misguided advice! Leaders volunteer, not because there's some tangible reward for doing so but because it's the right thing to do. You don't need to be so caught up with volunteering that you forget other responsibilities. However, just because you have other responsibilities doesn't mean you can't volunteer. So reach out and volunteer in some capacity, even if you receive nothing for it other than a good feeling.

Sixth is *honesty*, a different word from integrity but essentially the same. Remember that my mom didn't go to school. Anyway, she described this trait as being honest with yourself first, and if you could do that, you could be honest in all things. Now being honest with yourself can be pretty difficult, especially since you never know if you're being honest about your honesty—a Catch-22 either way you look at it, and denial can come rather easily. According to my mom, the real honesty about honesty is in the effort. If you work at being honest, you will be honest. It will become a discipline in everything you do.

Last is *humility*. All great leaders are *humble*. They have a sense of humor, and while they take their duties and

responsibilities seriously, they *never* take themselves seriously. They never forget where they came from and those who were part of their past. They never ask their people to do something they themselves would not do. They know being strong is important, but in the process of being strong, one must never put aside human emotions, laughter, tears, and love.

These are some pretty basic concepts of leadership and life. No doubt you've heard of others as have I. These, however, have been my basic and fundamental rules of the road. I sincerely hope they can be of benefit to you as they have been to me.